

# Bush Vindicated

**T**he political right in this country had a fine old time beating up on George Bush after the recent summit meeting. He was not tough enough on a weakened Soviet Union, conservatives complained; he was taken in by Mikhail Gorbachev.

Events have exploded those complaints with embarrassing swiftness. Developments in the U.S.S.R. show that Mr. Bush's tactics are working to help move Soviet policy in the direction we favor on all the major issues.

Patience has been the keynote of the President's approach to Soviet-American relations, before and at the latest meeting with Mr. Gorbachev. Thus he stayed calm when Moscow slapped an embargo on supplies to rebellious Lithuania, making clear American sympathy with the Baltic States' moves for independence but taking no punitive action.

Lithuania was one subject of complaint about the President's summit performance. He should not have

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## Carping about the summit has stopped.

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signed a trade agreement, the critics said, without obtaining a promise from Mr. Gorbachev to ease his pressure on the republic.

Mr. Bush decided, after much debate inside the Administration, that it would be counterproductive to try to make Mr. Gorbachev back down in the summit glare on a matter as politically sensitive as secessions from the Soviet Union. Mr. Bush went ahead on trade knowing — and Mr. Gorbachev knowing — that Congress would not carry out the agreement unless the Baltic situation eased.

Now Mr. Gorbachev has moved. This week he met the leaders of the Baltic republics, and Moscow began loosening the embargo on Lithuania.

Germany was another subject on which the critics faulted President Bush. Their point was that Mr. Gorbachev did not agree in Washington to the Western position that a newly united Germany should be a member of NATO. "Gorbachev has yielded nothing on Germany, on Lithuania," a Wall Street Journal editorial said.

Here again Mr. Bush thought the tactic of pushing Mr. Gorbachev to "yield" would be unwise. Instead he spelled out the West's position, making clear that the United States and its allies were ready to offer the Soviet Union assurances for its security vis-à-vis a strong Germany.

This week Mr. Gorbachev agreed that in a new Germany the former West German Army could belong to NATO while the former East German forces would not be attached to the Warsaw Pact. That is a meaningful step toward acceptance that a United Germany in NATO is better for the East's and the West's security.

Arms control, always a cause for conservative bristling, had much attention in a post-summit criticism. A right-wing outfit called the Center for Security Policy said the strategic arms framework agreement was "the worst strategic miscalculation on the part of a President of the United States since the Yalta Conference of 1945."

In fact the Start treaty, if completed along present lines, would reduce the total number of America's strategic nuclear warheads by 6.3 percent and the Soviet Union's by 13.8 percent. The United States would gain equality in the only area in which the U.S.S.R. now has a numerical edge, ballistic missiles. The U.S. would be allowed a greater number of nuclear bombs and cruise missiles.

Most analysts inside and outside the Government have concluded, as a Wall Street Journal story put it, that the Start treaty "will be lopsided in most respects in favor of the U.S."

Finally, the critics complained that Mr. Bush gave the Soviet President a boost at the summit just as he was fading politically at home. His troubles are mounting, the argument went, he is moving too slowly on reforms — and we should keep our distance from him.

Mr. Gorbachev does indeed face a sea of troubles. No one can be sure that he will survive politically.

The process of democratization that he started is by all signs proceeding. There is a freedom of discourse unimaginable in the Soviet Union until now. This week the Supreme Soviet approved a new press law that abolishes censorship and allows anyone to start a newspaper or magazine.

In those circumstances the correct American course is surely to encourage the movement toward freedom quietly, without the kind of overt pressure that might produce a backlash. At the same time we want to conclude agreements that reduce military threats, like Start. To hang back from those because of doubts about Mr. Gorbachev's hold on power would hardly be in our interest.

Mr. Bush got it right. The most interesting thing about his summit critics is really the frivolousness of their complaints. The end of the cold war has deprived the American right of its motherhood issue, the Communist threat. It is straining to keep the fear alive, and the strain shows. □